

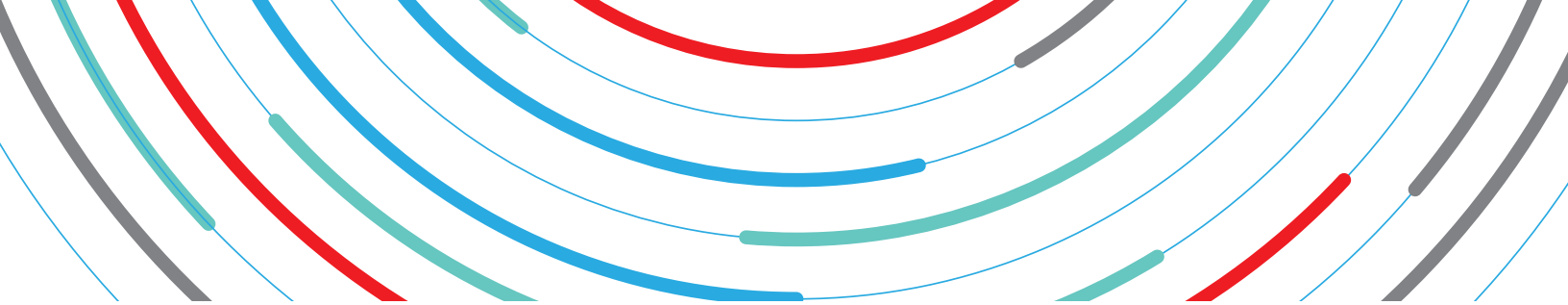
**Suuda Ganunsid,  
ad gina waadluuxan gan  
yahguudang Xaayda  
Gwaay.yaay iiji**

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**“To Inspire Understanding  
and Respect for All That  
Haida Gwaii is...”**

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By Gid yahk'ii (Sean Young)




Saahlinda Naay (Haida Gwaii Museum). Photo: Rolf Bettner.

### Biography of the author

My name is Gid yahk'ii (Sean Young), a proud member of the Haida Nation. I am from the Gaag'yals Kii'Gawaay, Raven clan of K'uuna Llnagaay (Skedans). Currently, I am the Manager/Curator of Collections and Archaeology at Saahlinda Naay Saving Things House (Haida Gwaii Museum) at Kay Llnagaay. I am also an educated and trained archaeologist. I completed five years of college at Malaspina University-College (now Vancouver Island University) as an Anthropology Major / History Minor. I have worked as a professional consulting archaeologist in the field on Haida Gwaii since 1997.

I have also worked as an instructor and guest lecturer for the Haida Gwaii Higher Education Societies Natural Resource Management, Marine Conservation semester. For up to three months every summer since 2004, I have also worked for the Haida Gwaii Watchmen Program as a cultural ambassador and caretaker living in an ancient Haida village, as well as cultural sites and the SGang Gwaay Llnagaay (Ninstints) UNESCO World Heritage site, all of which are located within the Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve's Haida Heritage Site.





Saahlinda Naay (“Saving Things House”), the Haida Gwaii Museum, is the result of one of the earliest, if not the earliest, steps towards *tl’l yahda* (“making things right,” or reconciliation) in the world of Indigenous peoples and museums. A vision of both Haidas and Canadians residing on Haida Gwaii, our museum society was founded in 1971. At that time, it was called the Queen Charlotte Islands Museum Society.<sup>1</sup> The Queen Charlotte Island Museum itself was opened in the community of Skidegate (HIGaagilda) in 1976.

This paper aims to show how we established a museum that provides a holistic, informal space for learning experiences that cuts across traditional museum boundaries. In addition to caring for and exhibiting our Haida treasures, Saahlinda Naay is a place for transmitting our traditional Haida Laws of *Yahguudang* (“Respect”) and *ad Kyanang kunGasda* (“to ask first”), and our Haida language, *Xaayda Kil*. Saahlinda Naay also promotes intangible cultural heritage and stimulates creativity and community development.

Saahlinda Naay was the name given to the museum by Elders, community members and the Skidegate Haida Immersion Program. The museum is governed by the longest living all-Island board on Haida Gwaii.

The board represents all communities on Haida Gwaii, both Haida and non-Haida. Today, along with the Skidegate Band Council and Gwaii Haanas/Parks Canada, we are a proud partner of the award-winning Haida Heritage Centre at Kay Llnagaay.

Our museum’s mandate is to promote understanding of all that Haida Gwaii is, with a primary focus on all aspects of historical and contemporary Haida culture. We are also dedicated to supporting and presenting Haida Gwaii’s settler history and natural history, and to building capacity in the fields of arts and heritage. Almost 50 years ago, Saahlinda Naay began with a small collection of Haida and settler works generously donated by local families. Today,

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<sup>1</sup> Until 2010, Haida Gwaii was named the Queen Charlotte Islands.



we are an internationally-recognized facility with an ever-growing collection of ancestral and contemporary treasures, including impressive representations of the island's natural world, a rich archival history of Haida Gwaii, and an exciting annual schedule of art exhibitions and educational programs. This box of treasures exists today because of the vision, dedication and hard work of the people of Haida Gwaii – people who know that by working together, good things happen.

Saahlinda Naay is located within the Haida Heritage Centre at Kay Llnagaay, an award-winning cultural tourism centre that protects and fosters Haida culture. The creation of the museum realized a dream of the Haida peoples for decades. During the 1990s and early 2000s, framework groups led by museum staff, Parks Canada, Skidegate Band Council, Elders, chiefs and community members from island communities met and helped design and create the new Centre. Before any ground-breaking or disturbance of the development site, we were informed and directed by the Haida people to be cautious: the new Haida Heritage Centre and Haida Gwaii Museum are located at Kay Llnagaay or “Sea-Lion Town,” an ancient village site that is home to the Kaay’ahl Laanas eagle clan, a large and strong family group with a hereditary chief (*Gaahlaay*), Matriarch (*Gwaaganad*) and many Elders.

With the guidance of the Kaay’ahl Laanas, we committed to follow all the requirements of the Archaeology Branch of the British Columbia government and complete an Archaeological Impact Assessment – this, even though the site falls within the Skidegate Indian Reserve IR1

boundaries, where development is not required to follow the Archaeological Impact Assessment guidelines and permits were not required. We nevertheless completed two assessments in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The first assessment was completed in 1999 with Council of the Haida Nation archaeologists and consulting company Millennia Research Ltd. It helped locate and identify the archaeological site, its boundaries and cultural features. This first project helped guide the footprint of the future buildings. The second archaeological impact assessment was completed from July to November 2003 by Haida archaeologists.

The Centre was designed to resemble the traditional oceanside Haida village that once stood in its place. The first phase of this massive project was raising six frontal poles over six days during the summer of 2001. The pole-raising event attracted visitors from all over the world. These poles, now standing in front of the Centre, represent six of the southernmost villages on Haida Gwaii: HlGaagilda (Skidegate), Ts’aahl, Cumshewa, K’uuna, SGang Gwaay and T’aanuu. Master carvers Norman Price, Garner Moody, Guujaw, Jim Hart, Tim Boyko and Giitsxaa carved the poles alongside their apprentices. This was a historic event as these were the first poles of their kind to be carved since the Bill Reid pole was raised in early June 1978. The Haida Heritage Centre opened its doors in 2007 and hosted a grand opening event in August of 2008. The stunning 50,000-square foot centre houses our Haida Gwaii Museum, Performance House, Carving Shed, Canoe House, Bill Reid Teaching Centre, two multipurpose classrooms and a spacious Welcome House area.



**“We are a people of strength.  
We owe this legacy to our  
Ancestors and to the beauty  
and richness of Haida Gwaii.  
We owe it to our children and  
our grandchildren to pass this  
legacy on... The Kay Llnagaay  
Heritage Centre is a way for  
us to preserve and celebrate  
our past, enabling us to share  
our history with our children  
and with visitors.”**

– Diane Brown, Chief Councillor, Skidegate, 1995

# Tl' yahda “making things right” (Reconciliation)

We house a unique and comprehensive collection of historical and post-contact archival materials that is accessible to the public within a setting that evokes the community identities of both Haida and settler communities on Haida Gwaii. Our collection includes ancestral and contemporary Haida works (both utilitarian and ceremonial), settler pieces, audio recordings of Haida songs, histories and stories as given by Haida Elders in both the Haida and English languages, and a plethora of photographs.

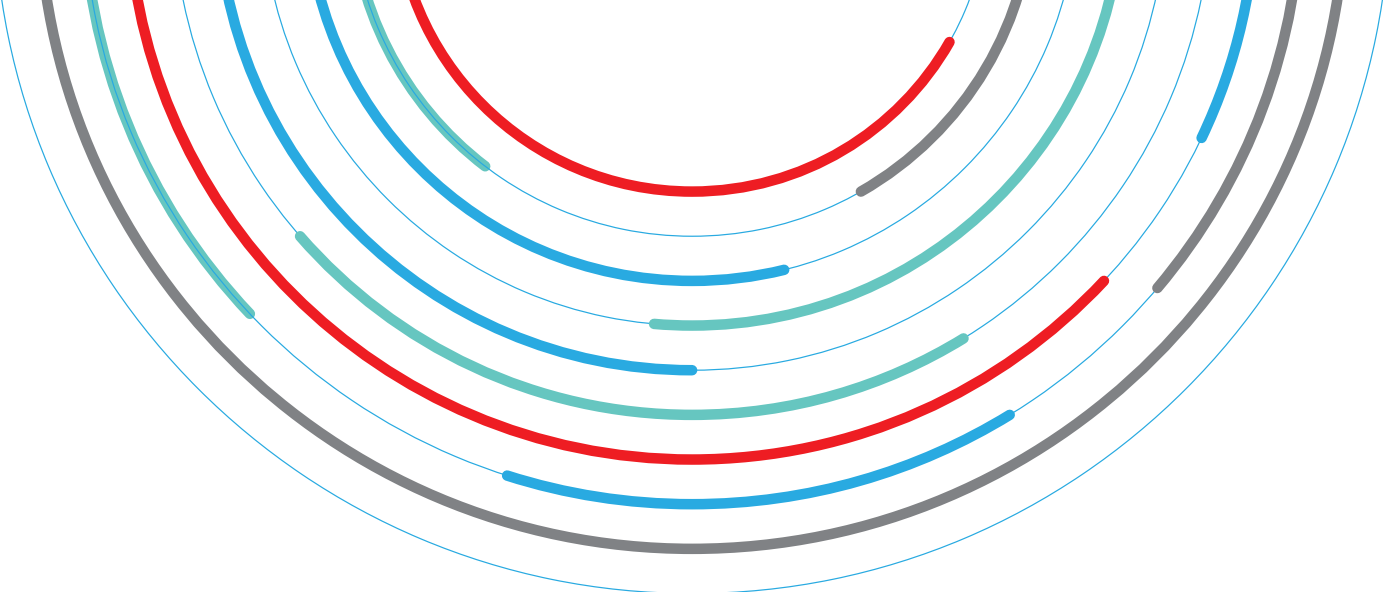
Addressing contemporary social issues concerning the politics of land, the environment and interdependent ecologies, as well as presenting Haida oral histories and politics of cultural heritage and memory, are a critical part of the mandate of the Haida Gwaii Museum. We tell ancient stories of creation, natural history and environmental change, as well as the recent retellings of these

stories that are just in the last few years being told by scientific findings. Saahlinda Naay speaks with the Haida voice by sharing our culture and worldview and putting forward multiple ways of knowing that empower our once nearly-silenced voices. Dominant Western narratives are challenged by including Haida knowledge-holders and scholarly community voices, and by exploring community-centred ways of knowing. Throughout the museum, labeling and interpretation are done in Xaayda Kil (Haida Language) first, and then in English. Elders and fluent Xaayda Kil speakers and the Skidegate Haida Immersion Program are consulted and provide the proper spelling and interpretation for the museum. Haida clans and families are also consulted if the cultural object is noted and recorded as originating from a specific Ancestor's clan or town.



Two T'aanuu Llnagaay frontal poles that were raised in the Pole Gallery. Photo: Gid yahk'ii (Sean Young)





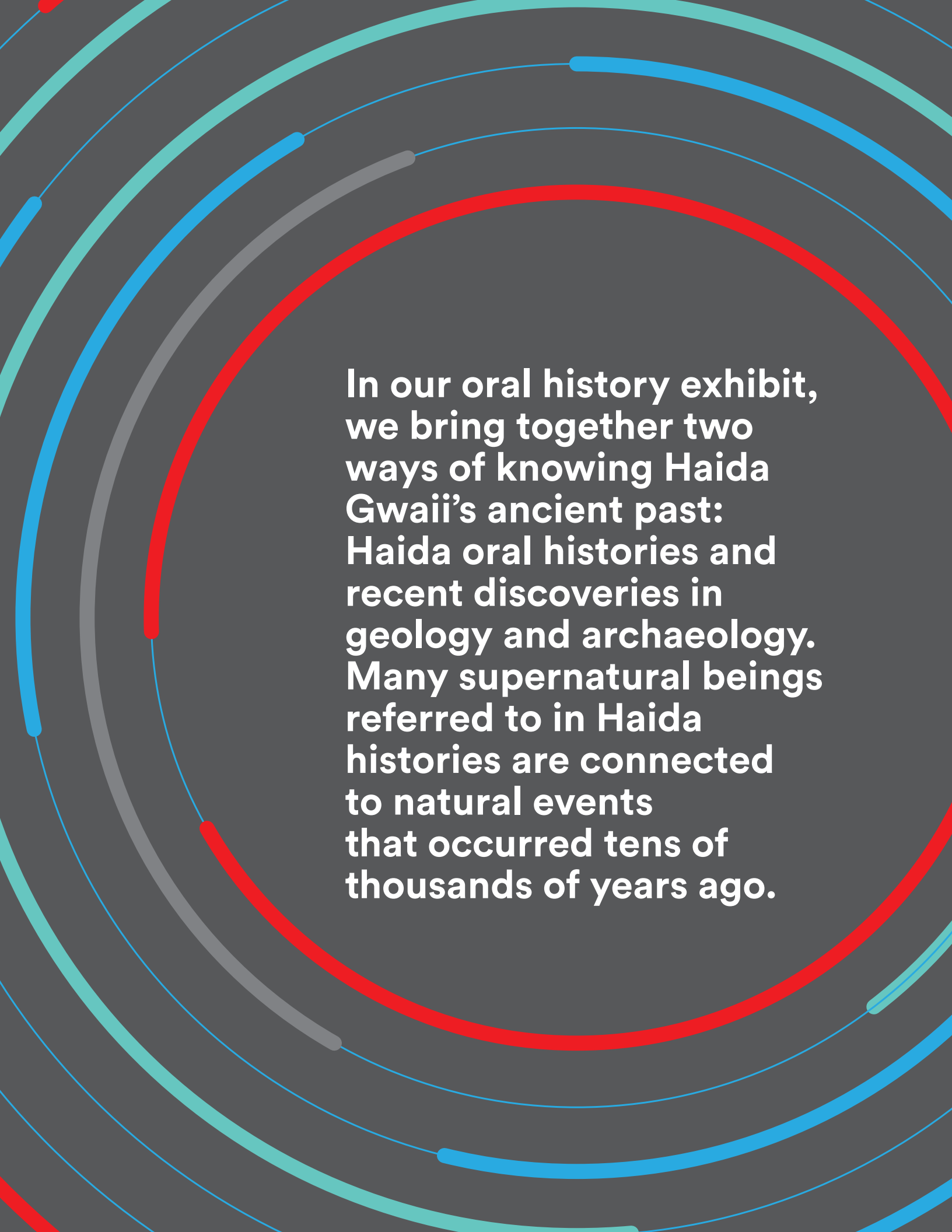
There are two GyaaGang (house frontal poles) presented in our Pole Gallery, and both are from T'aanuu Llnagaay (Eelgrass Town). One pole is from the K'uuna KiiGawaay (Eagle Clan, from T'aanuu) and the other from the K'aadaas Gaa K'iigawaay (Ravens, of T'aanuu). Both hereditary chiefs and clans were consulted on what to do with the poles; many options were discussed, including laying them down, raising them, or bringing them back to their home at T'aanuu Llnagaay. Both clans made the decision to have them raised in the museum and were present to help raise them into place within the Pole Gallery.

The curatorial foundation of Saahlinda Naay is to encourage a more holistic learning experience by going beyond traditional museum boundaries that separate knowledge and our understanding of natural and cultural worlds. This strategy exposes viewers to new ideas, stimulates their minds, and explores other ways of knowing and informal ways of understanding the contemporary world. We believe museums are spaces of encounter or areas of discovery where members of the community both drive the direction of the museum and share their way of knowing the world. The process of informal learning is both reciprocal and continual. This philosophical direction is a way to engage the public in dialogue to help facilitate multiple and

diverse ways of knowing. It embraces a holistic approach to the exploration of a complex and changing contemporary world.

In our museum, Haida treasures serve many important uses in addition to the usual museum functions of exhibition, research, educational programs and conservation. For example, some pieces in our collection are used within Haida ceremonies, feasts and other significant events. We work hard to make these pieces available to our clans and people for special uses such as potlatches, while maintaining our responsibility to care for them and maintain their security. This is a very delicate and serious matter of ensuring that our responsibility to conserve and preserve the objects to the standards followed by all museums around the world is also in accordance with our cultural practices and the wishes of our clans, Elders and people.

Haida knowledge, scientific information, natural specimens, oral history and art all blend together in a fluid and constantly changing exhibit setting. Underlying it all is the understanding of our inseparable relationship to the land, the sea and the supernaturals, a relationship that which gives Haida Gwaii its incomparable natural and cultural character.



**In our oral history exhibit, we bring together two ways of knowing Haida Gwaii's ancient past: Haida oral histories and recent discoveries in geology and archaeology. Many supernatural beings referred to in Haida histories are connected to natural events that occurred tens of thousands of years ago.**



# Everything depends on everything else – The Saving Things House In the Beginning

The Haida people come from supernatural beings who came out of the ocean. Our world began thousands and thousands of years ago. Haida oral histories tell of these beginnings and the many events that followed, including the affairs of the notorious Nang Kilsdlaas (Raven). “This island was nothing but saltwater,” they say. “Raven flew around. He looked for a place to land in the water. By and by, he flew to a reef lying at the south end of the island, to sit on it. But the great mass of supernatural beings had their necks resting on one another on it, like sea cucumbers... It was both light and dark,” they say. (Original story recorded by John Swanton in 1905.)

In our oral history exhibit, we bring together two ways of knowing Haida Gwaii’s ancient past: Haida oral histories and recent discoveries in geology and archaeology. Many supernatural beings referred to in Haida histories are connected to natural events that occurred tens of thousands of years ago. This exhibit area highlights four stories that enrich our experience and knowledge of Haida Gwaii’s past. These include Nang Kilsdlaas (Raven), Kalga Jaad (Ice Woman), SGuuluu Jaad (Foam Woman) and Jiila Kuns (Creek Woman). The ancestral beings provide testimony as to how far Haida knowledge of the Islands extends into Haida Gwaii’s ancient past. Kalga Jaad, a supernatural being and Haida ancestress, talks of the last Ice Age when the late Wisconsin Cordilleran Ice Sheet

was at its height some 20,000 – 23,000 years ago and began slowly receding about 15,600 years ago. By 13,000 years ago, the West Coast mainland, the Hecate Strait and Haida Gwaii were still largely ice-free. Sea levels are known to have been around 150 m lower than levels found today. Kalga Jaad is said to have led the Haida to lands and territories that were free from the advancing glaciers and that provided resources to live by. References to Kalga Jaad are shrouded in mystery, but the name is preserved and is still in use today in Skidegate in the Gak’yaals KiiGwawaay Raven Clan of K’uuna LInagaay. Beginning in the 1980s and 1990s, archaeologists began piecing together evidence of very old habitation sites, mostly found in intertidal areas, and from an era when sea levels were considerably lower than today. SGuuluu Jaad (Foam Woman) stories speak of a time when these sea levels were lower and then started to swiftly rise, forcing our Ancestors to move away, further inland from the rising sea. Science tells us that this started around 15,000 years ago when the glaciers were receding. In a secondary level of exhibits (backdrop to the three story modules), the sequence of scientific, archaeological and natural knowledge about human history on Haida Gwaii are revealed through stone, bone and wood-tool technology, the changes in tool technology over time, and rare petrified caribou and walrus specimens.



Oral History Gallery: Exhibit merging different ways of knowing. Far left is SQuuluu Jaad (Foam Woman), middle is a fragment of a frontal pole telling the story of a flood, and right is the exhibit describing the science of the geological evidence of rising sea levels. Photo: Gid yahk'ii (Sean Young)

## Yahguudang “To Pay Respect”

Our Ancestors are our relatives and we have a deep connection to them. We are who we are today because of them. We believe that as long as the remains of our Ancestors are stored in museums and other unnatural locations far from home, that the souls of these people are wandering and unhappy. Once they are returned to their homeland of Haida Gwaii and are laid to rest with honour, the souls can rest and our communities may heal a bit more.

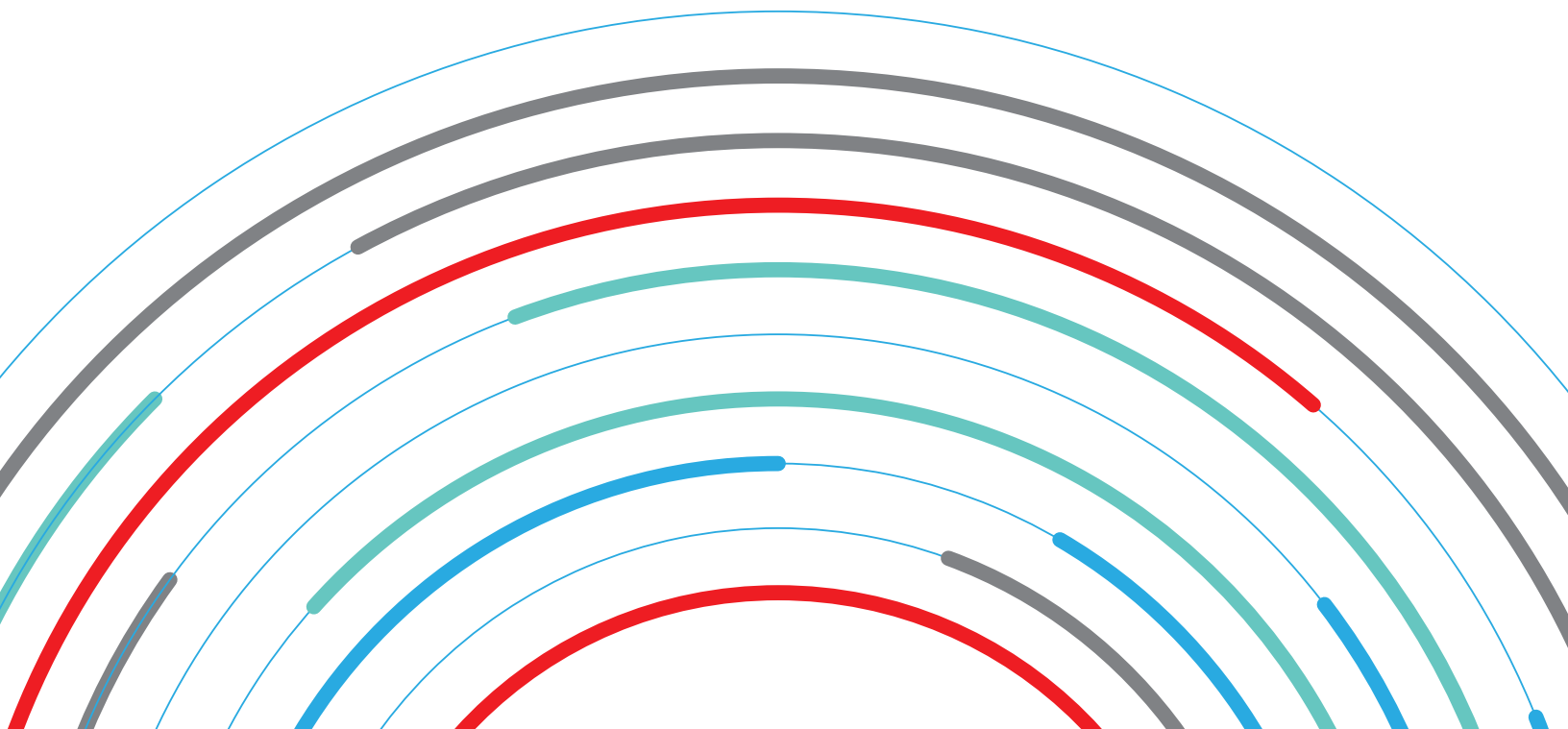
The Haida Repatriation Committee (HRC), started in the mid-1990s, is a group of volunteers who have taken on the responsibility and are dedicated

to the repatriation of the remains of Haida Ancestors, cultural belongings and intangible heritage from global museums and institutions around the world.

The HRC is made up of two official branches: the Skidegate Repatriation & Cultural Committee (located in the village of Skidegate and administered through Saahlinda Naay) and The Old Massett Repatriation & Cultural Committee (located in the village of Old Massett and administered through the Haida Heritage Society). Individually, each committee works on behalf of its community and together we work on behalf of the Haida Nation.

The tasks of the HRC are: to research and identify where Haida Ancestors and cultural materials are located in Canada, the United States, Europe and beyond; to contact and negotiate with institutions for the return of remains and funerary materials; and to see that the remains of our Ancestors are cared for with proper respect and brought home in safety for burial on Haida Gwaii. We have been working on the repatriation of Haida Ancestors for over 30 years. Today the remains of over 500 Ancestors have been returned home. This has been our first priority. When this work is complete, we can again turn our attention to the work of bringing home other Haida treasures

and cultural materials. Repatriation is a long and complex process that involves many people. The Repatriation Committees of Skidegate and Old Massett are authorized to do this work on behalf of our nation by the Hereditary Leaders of Haida Gwaii, the Council of the Haida Nation, the Skidegate Band Council and the Old Massett Village Council. Regular consultation and planning meetings are held with our Hereditary Chiefs Council, Elders and the rest of the Haida communities. Every part of the process is guided by the wishes of the Haida community.





United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
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